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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-08 L-03 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00
EUR-12 DOTE-00 /044 W
----------071177 121340Z /53
R 100915Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1759
USDOC WASHDC
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

NAIROBI FOR REDSO

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELTN ETRD BC RH
SUBJ: BOTSWANA TAKEOVER OF RHODESIAN RAILWAY: U.S. LOCOMOTIVE SUPPLIERS INTERVIEWED

REF: GABORONE 0619

1. AMCIT S.W. MATTESON, GM REPRESENTATIVE IN JOHANNESBURG, VISITED GABORONE MARCH 8 FOR TALKS WITH GOB OFFICIALS AND BRITISH TRANSMARK RAILROAD CONSULTANTS ON POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF LOCOMOTIVES IN CONNECTION WITH BOTSWANA TAKEOVER OF RHODESIA RAILWAY. MATTESON SPENT SEVERAL HOURS WITH NEWLY ARRIVED TRANSMARK TEAM CHIEF REGINALD GREGORY WHO WILL REPORTEDLY BECOME GENERAL MANAGER OF BOTSWANA RAILWAYS. ACCORDING TO MATTESON, GREGORY IS EXPERIENCED RAILROAD MAN WHO CAME TO
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BOTSWANA AFTER COMPLETING CONTRACT AS MANAGER OF KOWLOON/ CANTON RAILWAY.

2. ACCORDING TO GM REPHMATTESON, GOB AND TRANSMARK OFFICIALS APPEAR TO BE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN PURCHASING AT LEAST SOME LOCOMOTIVES IN NEAR FUTURE. HOWEVER, MATTESON WAS UNABLE TO PIN DOWN GREGORY ON NUMBER OF LOCOMOTIVES OR DATE WHEN GOB

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MIGHT BE READY TO BUY. MATTESON TOLD US THAT HE GAVE GREGORY DETAILED SPECIFICATIONS OF LOCOMOTIVES AND THAT U.S. DESIGNS ARE STRONGLY PREFERRED BY TRANSMARK PLANNERS. ACCORDING TO MATTESON, 60 PERCENT OF R500,000/UNIT MONETARY VALUE OF GM LOCOMOTIVES ASSEMBLED IN SOUTH AFRICA CONSISTS OF PARTS IMPORTED FROM U.S.

3. GREGORY AGREED TO PROVIDE MATTESON WITH "PROFILE" OF RAILWAY CURVES AND GRADES IN BOTSWANA SO THAT GM CAN DO COMPUTER STUDY OF BOTSWANA RAILWAYS LOCOMOTIVE REQUIREMENTS. GOB AND TRANSMARK OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO ACCEPTED MATTESON'S INVITATION TO VISIT GM'S BUSINESS OFFICE IN JOHANNESBURG AND ASSEMBLY PLANT AT PORT ELIZABETH DURING MAY.

4. MATTESON TOLD US THAT HE WAS VERY FAVORABLY IMPRESSED BY ENTHUSIASM AND TECHNICAL COMPETENCE OF GREGORY AND OTHER MEMBERS OF TRANSMARK TEAM. ACCORDING TO MATTESON, GOB AND TRANSMARK ARE APPROACHING ORGANIZATION OF BOTSWANA RAILWAYS FROM LONG TERM PERSPECTIVE ENVISIONING REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK WHICH WILL EXIST AFTER CURRENT RHODESIAN CRISIS IS PASSED. GREGORY REPORTEDLY SEES COOPERATION BETWEEN BOTSWANA RAILWAYS AND SAR AS ONE OF CORNERSTONES OF FUTURE RAILROAD NETWORK IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.

5. COMMENT: GOB AND TRANSMARK APPEAR TO BE SHIFTING THEIR EMPHASIS FROM CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR EMERGENCY TAKEOVER OF
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RHODESIA RAILWAYS TO LONG-RANGE PROJECTIONS OF BOTSWANA RAILWAYS' ROLE IN FUTURE SOUTHERN AFRICAN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM. GOB MAY WELL BE CONTEMPLATING PURCHASE OF A FEW LOCOMOTIVES IN ORDER TO ASSURE POTENTIAL DONORS OF ITS COMMITMENT TO RAILROAD TAKEOVER PROJECT. HOWEVER, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT GOB IS ABLE OR INCLINED TO MAKE LARGE-SCALE LOCOMOTIVE PURCHASES UNTIL IBRD STUDY IS COMPLETED AND DONOR CONSORTIUM ORGANIZED.
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